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LETTER OF THE MAJOR SUPERIORS CONFERENCE OF RELIGIOUS IN AUSTRALIA TO THE APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR MSG. . FILIPE CARLOS BELO, THE CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS OF EAST TIMOR.

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

Recognising that the Church is a sign and instrument of the Kingdom, we the Major Superiors of Religious in Australia write to express our heartfelt support for all your efforts to bring about a just and lasting peace in East Timor. We know that this is the deepest aspiration of your people.

We write to you as a neighbouring Church, remembering our strong historical ties, and in response to your repeated calls especially to Christians to recognise your struggles for justice and a peaceful resolution to the peoples hopes. We know the people of East Timor look to you, the leaders of the Church, for strength in their desire to preserve life, human dignity and cultural identity in their land. Many are the victims of other people's decisions to violently impose their solutions.

We are deeply saddened by 9 years of war causing almost continued suffering. We are now aware that the military occupation has had a devastating and irreparable effect on all sections of the population. It has been instrumental in widespread famine and malnutrition, family disunity, enforced separation from traditional land, an alarming increase in the number of orphans and widows and disregard for the rights of religious belief, human respect, personal property and life itself. Above all we are most concerned by the lack of opportunity given to the people of East Timor to participate in decisions affecting both their socio-political future and the economic, cultural and even family affairs of daily life.

We are told that many social and economic benefits have been offered to the people. It is not our competence to make political assessments of either side. While we continue to pray for reconciliation we can see that no conclusive solution is imminent. Radically alternative solutions are now called for, and in such a situation we feel it is our right and duty to stand behind the People of God in your country as they search for the Truth.

In this we recognise your expressed wish that the international community be given full opportunity to scrutinise events in East Timor and to assist in a just resolution of the present impasse. As followers of Jesus Christ we feel we cannot condone any attempt to resolve the disenchantment and oppression of the people of East Timor through the exercise of military power, dislocation and harassment.
While we continue to offer our prayers and material assistance through appropriate channels we request your direction and suggestions concerning what we can do to help you proclaim the good news of freedom and justice for the people of your country.

Fraternally yours in Christ

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